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FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
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INFO RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 5477
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 8564
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 1276
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 8937
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY 6788

C O N F I D E N T I A L ISLAMABAD 010429

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/05/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PK](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: KABUL DEMONSTRATIONS CONTINUE TO GENERATE PRESS IN
PAKISTAN

REF: KABUL 2524

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. Pakistani papers continue to give attention to last week's demonstrations in Kabul, with most characterizing the precipitating incident as a sign of American arrogance and the resulting demonstrations as a bellwether of increasing Afghan impatience with the American presence. The high point of negative coverage came on May 31, when virtually all papers -- both English and Urdu and representing every political persuasion -- included extensive editorial coverage of the incident. Many papers have continued to offer assessments through the weekend. A representative sample of coverage follows:

-- Editorial in Islamabad-based Urdu daily, "Ausaf," 5/31: "Most of the Afghans hate Americans, and this incident has exposed the true face of the forerunner of democracy. The U.S. did not liberate the Afghans; in fact, they have stolen the freedom of Afghanistan."

-- Editorial in Lahore-based English daily "Daily Times," 5/31: "Afghanistan's woes are not only or mainly because of Pakistan, an allegation that Mr. Karzai and his government have repeatedly hurled at Islamabad. The Kabul rioters were not Taliban; they were common Afghans unhappy with the situation...The incident should also put the U.S. on notice. The clock is ticking on its presence..."

-- Op-Ed in national Urdu daily "Nawa-e-Waqt," 6/1: "The sudden rebellion in Kabul had nothing to do with Al-Qaida or Mullah Omar. Moreover, Kabul is not dominated by Pashtuns. Americans say that the brakes of their truck had failed...It was not the failure of brakes of just one truck; the brakes of entire United States of America have failed."

-- Lahore-based English daily "Daily Times," and national English daily "The News" 6/2: Both dailies carried in full a transcription of the June 1 NY Times editorial "Afghanistan, Unraveling."

-- Op-Ed in National English daily "The News," 6/2: "...the scale of the furious anti-America riots in the capital city of Afghanistan has confounded the US and its western allies....The intriguing aspect of the deadly riots was the preponderance of Tajiks...The U.S. and its allies ... should have known that the Afghan people wouldn't indefinitely tolerate the presence of foreign, non-Muslim troops."

-- Article in Lahore-based English daily "Daily Times" 6/4: Transcribed AFP story headlined: "'Bad Behavior' Holding US Troops back from Conquering Kabul."

12. (C) Comment: The rioting in Kabul has struck different chords in Pakistan. Anti-U.S. Islamists trumpet it as an indication that western "occupation" of Afghanistan is on its last legs. Elsewhere, the unrest is seen as lending credence to the view that violence in Afghanistan has indigenous roots (including among Tajiks) and is not Pakistan's responsibility. A broader and more thoughtful concern is that if Karzai and the coalition are in fact in trouble in Afghanistan, the implications for Pakistan are not good. The excellent analysis in reftel will be most helpful as we engage interlocutors here. Given the impact of the U.S. media on local commentary, we hope Department backgrounders will help put the incident in context and bring a sense of proportion to media coverage.

CROCKER